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THE EVIL OF ART SCHOOLS

It has frequently been noted that art declines somewhat in the ratio of conscious effort to further it. The great periods knew only masters and disciples; the times of decadence abound in academies and permanent schools.

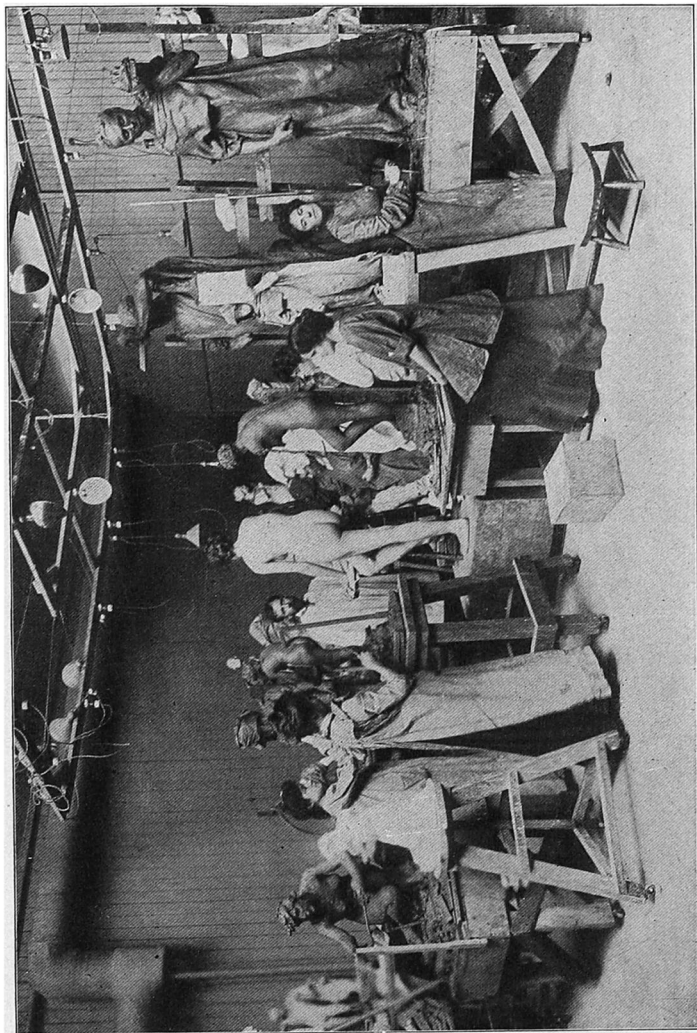
At present the fact may easily be verified by any one who will visit successively the Royal Academy at London, the Paris Salon, and current exhibitions at Amsterdam and The Hague. London and Paris have elaborate systems for producing painters. Before those who study at the Academy schools or the École des Beaux Arts lie all manner of official honors and material rewards. The academicians of either country enjoy a traditional prestige and a corresponding social position.

Holland, on the contrary, does next to nothing for her painters. They study in small bands of disciples about the older masters, they wander through the schools of France and Germany—in short, like Topsy, they just grow, without the fostering care of academies and ministers of fine arts.

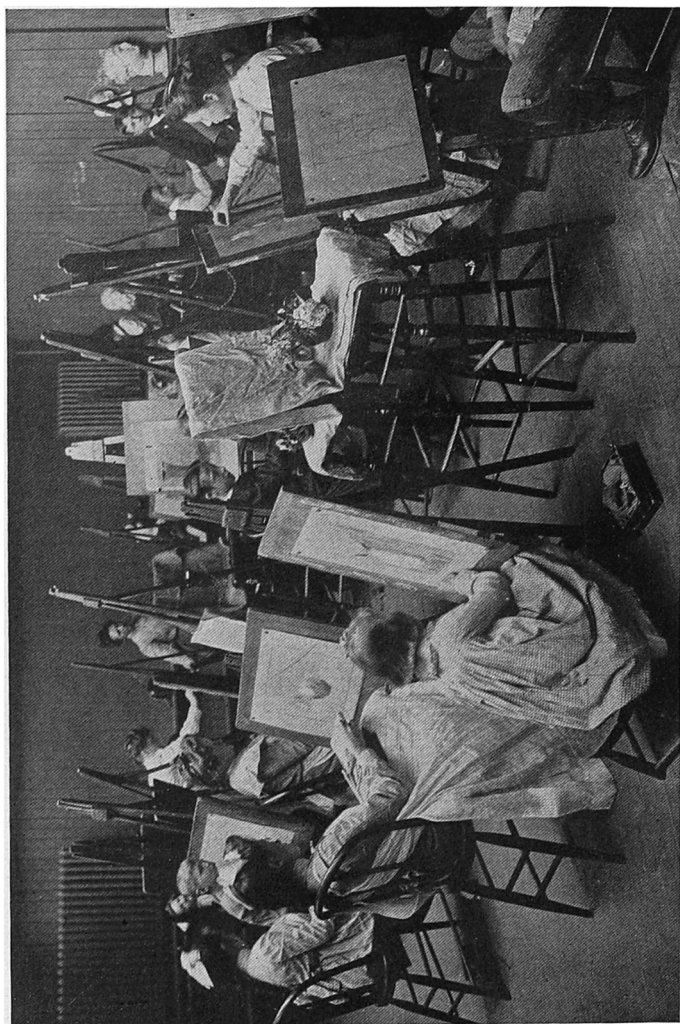
Comparing the painting of Holland with the academic production of France and England, one is struck with the sobriety and excellence of the Dutch school. There is, first of all, a genuine continuation of the tradition of the seventeenth century, which rests, not upon organized authority, but upon the temperament of individual artists. The level of craftsmanship is higher than will be found elsewhere. There is a refreshing absence of incompetence and eccentricity.

These painters know their subjects—chiefly the landscape and peasant life of their own country—and know how to make paint assume the look of light, air, and life. Yet there is nothing backward about the school. It has freely profited by all the recent innovations, impressionistic or otherwise, without yielding to the eccentricities in vogue. Everywhere one notes good judgment and sound accomplishment; that is, precisely the qualities which academies are founded to promote.

How ill academies do their work to-day is shown in London and Paris. Go through the Royal Academy or the Salon and your eye will infallibly reject the native product and rest upon some quiet bit by an American, Dutch, or Scandinavian painter. For more than a hundred years the Royal Academy has been the custodian of British art, and the result is stupidity, ineptitude, mediocrity. For nearly two hundred years the Salon has been subsidized by the State, and the result is incredible vulgarity. The three thousand pictures annually exhibited by these two academies have very little to do with art.



TYPICAL MODERN LIFE-CLASS · SCULPTURE



TYPICAL MODERN JUVENILE CLASS: STILL-LIFE

In England they are painted to be sold to a sentimental and untrained public; in France they are painted to be exhibited to a calloused and mistreated public. In London the official encouragement of art has seemingly produced an entire obscuration of talent; in Paris it has drawn a great supply of talent into vulgar ways of seeing and painting. In one case art languishes from too little skill; in the other it perishes from skill perverted.

Moreover, the saving remnant of French and British painters has held aloof from the academies. Indeed, the various secessions from Munich to New York are so many signs of discontent with the cut-



BANDINELLI'S STUDIO
Showing Master and Disciples
From an Engraving by Himself

and-dried methods of the schools. And as these revolutionary bodies become formalized they in turn drive out the best spirits, so that the more accomplished artists are generally to be found isolated from the craft, or joined in small congenial groups. It appears that we have to do with a secular process by which art ever renews itself only on condition of renouncing official patronage. That would seem the morale of Holland, France, and England to-day.

As usual, the trouble lies at the root—in the art schools. Never in any healthy period of art has an apprentice spent years in making “studies.” From the first the pupil was taught to do things that were useful. If it were only laying in a background or tracing a

cartoon, his earliest efforts contributed something to the art of his time, and his equipment was gained, not in profitless competition with those who were no better than himself, but in daily contact with a great master. All the studies and investigations which are comparatively dead in themselves, he made under guidance and in view of genuine problems.

To-day men work seven or ten or more years for the great stake of artistic success; if they fail, that time is relatively thrown away, and they are subjected to a kind of humiliation which befalls no other class of earnest workers. Under the old conditions of discipleship, every art student had the satisfaction of serving usefully, and those to whom greatness was denied, at least found naturally their places as



AN OLD-TIME STUDIO
Showing Master and Disciples
From an Engraving

artist-artisans and the like. Such tragedy of utter failure as we see not uncommonly to-day was hardly known until the great art mills were invented to sweep in those who had no vocation, and grind them out half-trained or mistrained.

To be sure wholesale methods have replaced discipleship in many other branches of study; but in these it has not had the same stupefying results. You may make tolerable doctors or lawyers by machine methods; the training of the artist is peculiarly an individual matter and not to be intrusted to the syndicates.

Probably no M. Combes of painting will expropriate the art schools of the world and scatter the "professors." Very likely it would be better if such a tyrant would compel a return to discipleship. In any case it should be understood that no more great art schools are needed.

P.



TYPICAL MODERN LIFE CLASS



TYPICAL MODERN HEAD CLASS